

Bohol - Philippines: More Than the Usual Tourist Spot

Bohol, a small island in central Philippines, is known for the world famous and unique Chocolate Hills. It is one of the country's most popular tourist spots. It's true though that when most people think of Bohol, almost nothing else comes to mind. It might surprise you that it is more than the usual tourist spot and that there's more to explore and to see in this island than those limestone hill formations.

Bohol is home to pristine beach shores. Panglao Island, just minutes away from the capital Tagbilaran, is increasingly gaining more popularity among local and foreign tourists as a more laid-back and tranquil beach destination alternative to Boracay.

But if you're the kind who's not satisfied with having a few dips in the water and taking in spectacular beachfront views, Bohol will certainly not disappoint. Scuba divers have more than enough choices of world class diving spots surrounding the island. Colorful coral reefs and rich marine life will surely satisfy all types of explorers, from novice snorkelers to expert divers.

Another popular attraction is dolphin and whale watching. Pamilacan Island is headquarters to the best spotters that arrange these tours. Most were former hunters who joined the dolphin and whale watching program after the Philippine government banned the killing of these marine mammals.

Bohol's exotic wildlife is not limited underwater. The island's last remaining forests protect unique fauna. It is home to one of the world's smallest primates, the tarsier. You can visit the Philippine Tarsier Foundation in Corella and see the timid and peculiar animal in its natural habitat.

The Rajah Sikatuna National Park, a large forest reserve near Bilar, is a bird-watcher's paradise. Treks along the trails throughout the park can lead you to an encounter with some of the country's rare bird species.

Bohol is also a place rich with culture and history. Century-old churches in Baclayon, Loboc, Loay, Maribojoc, Loon and Dauis are a few of the standing monuments. And there are old Spanish watchtowers in Punta Cruz, Dauis, Panglao and Pamilacan.

If you want to keep away from the province's usual tourist trail, you can travel along the less popular eastern side of the island. It has some of the most amazing coastlines, and secluded beaches, from the town of Anda in the southeast to the town of Talibon in the north.

Some of the towns in Bohol also offer community-based tours. Calape, Maribojoc and Candijay are among such towns. It is a great option to visit these towns' protected mangrove areas and experience the quaint rural life in this part of the country. These tours showcase how resolute the locals are in preserving the island's natural environment.

But to really experience Bohol is to experience the people's hospitality. Try visiting the island in May when town fiestas are celebrated almost everyday. You can hop from town to town without having to bring money other than for transportation. You'd surely be invited to residents' homes and enjoy feasts of lechon baboy (roasted pig) and kinilaw (raw fish).

Bohol is an island blessed with so much bounty and natural beauty. There's no argument about that. What sets it apart from other tourist spots is that there's so much to explore and so much to do that it's actually pretty difficult to decide which one to do first. Of course, you can't pass up a visit to the impressive Chocolate Hills. But staying overnight at this famous spot just to see stunning sunrise and sunset over the surreal landscape will be well worth it.

About the Author

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